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Education by Design: Part III A design that inspires all



A design that inspires all

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TRILOGY
ARCHITECTURE URBAN DESIGN RESEARCH

Every one of us has had a teacher who inspired us in our early life, maybe more than one. Those teachers who are able to create an environment where learning becomes an exciting experience are never forgotten. On the other hand, how many of us were inspired as children by the building itself where we went to school. You remember those buildings; more often than not we referred to them as prisons, with heavy brick facades, dark hallways smelling of too much antiseptic, and classroom windows that more often than not were covered with blinds to keep out the sun's glare. Too many schools are still being built today as warehouses with windows; they get the job done on some minimal level, but beyond that, they simply do not excite the children who spend a great deal of their lives within their walls.

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Creating an environmentally friendly building is important, but that's only part of the equation. If you ask kids, their parents or the teachers what is important to them, the to – do list gets a lot longer. We asked the students at Redding School of the Arts from kindergarten up to eighth grade what was important to them and the words they used were exciting, fun, comfortable, fun, unique, and fun. Get the idea? Kids want a place that stimulates them all the time. The teachers agreed but added a few new words such as flexibility in their teaching environment and storage to the list. Parents of course added safety.

So how did we address these wants? It all starts with the classroom design because that is where children spend most of their time at school. Our classrooms are shaped to allow for flexibility in teaching styles that can range from formal lecture to informal studio. Each classroom has a primary learning area with an adjacent accessory space for small group learning. One hundred percent of the general classrooms are oriented to the north and east for best quality of natural lighting. The ceilings and walls are acoustically insulated to provide a balance between sound quality within the class and sound isolation from adjacent rooms. Technology is recognized as an important tool for teachers with projectors and large – screen TV's that can broadcast within the class or to another school entirely. Storage is available within the class and in a room adjacent to each class as well as general storage for the school. This allows for multiple learning materials to be more easily rotated by the individual teachers. Our classrooms even have retractable rolling stages for student performance. But learning in this school is designed to go beyond the general classroom.

The hallways have been designed as "learning streets", with space for sitting, talking and studying under a translucent canopy and flooded with fresh air. Everywhere there are opportunities for student exhibits, because that is where the focus should be. There is no cafeteria, no gymnasium and no auditorium, yet all these activities can be accommodated within the building design. The assembly and performance space is a covered outdoor theater. Carefully designed to allow for multimedia presentations in less than ideal weather, the space is mostly protected from the elements with some heating and cooling. There is no stage house, but rather three adjacent music/dance classrooms, one or all of which can be opened to the seating depending on the needs of the production. The cafeteria has been replaced with four separate thematic cafes which allow for student socializing in medium group sizes. Exercise occurs everywhere, from dance rooms to a covered play court. We want to create new traditions instead of traditional spaces.

And speaking of play, we listened carefully to the students and their list. Learning is a serious business, but all too often the architecture of our schools is too serious. We wanted to incorporate a sense of playfulness into this design, from the floor patterns running through the galleries to the LED lighting designed to change color depending on the school themes being demonstrated. Outdoor "art walls" have been added for student painting and repainting. The outdoor area is a balance between creative play and unstructured open spaces. Whether it's the playground, the gardens or the outdoor classrooms, the outside environment is as important in this design as the inside, and the line between the two has been intentionally blurred. There's even a slide from the second floor to the first in the main gallery.

This school has been designed to function for a hundred years. But well before then, we should all hope that the innovative environmental and energy features incorporated into its design have become commonplace in all of our buildings. Yet children will always be children, with their need to be inspired to dream big dreams.

And those ideals will never become commonplace.

This piece is part three of a three-series article that has been featured on DesignShare in past months. Read [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) here.

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